

## *Dragon Snow*

The five-mast massive ship had sailed through snow, rain, hail, and someone who claimed a whoosh of falling coffee cups. Of course she likely had a bit much expensive cognac, stolen from a man who irritated her black leather armor (partial bodice) when passing through the largest market on the planet. Not wise for him. After all, Solène is one of the best in our seven-strong strange group. Watch out.

The five-mast wonder boat name of Sperry, dressed lovely in big bold earthy tone sails, itself blazed now in sunlight but was cold cold cold due to traveling these far away water regions a mere few leagues from geographic pole. None had ever been this distant north off a map, and none aboard right now really knew where they were going, anyway. All land in view was covered with ice and snow, some of it ravenously bright, lots of it rippled with black rocks so nasty sharp that...well, best to stay away a bit.

The sea here was surely very deep, and the water very dark. Forbidding. But never frozen at all. Perhaps close though. Relatively calm.

As for the trip, it was foolish intellect to believe that a small never-seen sphere so many had always wanted—said to be like a hand-sized glass ball packed in void but showing incredible patterns of real stars—would so closely dwell in frost not far from actual planetary pole...if not technically placed upon it.

On city streets, word had it that placing the sphere atop a boat's figurehead or even a bow of anything on the water, anywhere, caused the sphere to show night skies in great detail, automatically causing any boat or what have you to move with desired navigation, unattended.

Which seems ridiculous no question and a major find, if true. Why all of us were here, yes? It was even said by a man known for cooking purple onions that the sphere was capable of correcting courses it followed, to avoid shallow reefs, rocks, or even small uncharted islands. Well, then.

Right now the five-mast large Sperry ship was well cartographically above any understood assembly of water or land. It crosses fathomless smooth brine out here, with peace.

The Sperry really was impressive, with a hay-blonde Commander everyone liked a great deal no doubt due to her excellence and widely enjoyed sense of military fashion...both for herself and her crew, most especially with their professional boots stitched by easily the best tiny factory known.

The Commander was socially well represented as a practicing witch, exclusive to white-tint “Eclectic” covens that she rarely visited, instead making her ship and crew the primary venture, regardless of whatever small magick she might like to throw at an unwanted wave, predator, or even a batch of highly spiced soup, usually from rare lentils found in fun places.

The Sperry itself was built only a year ago, and we all hired the boat the same day the Commander placed seven flags on sails and decks, all of them cut from different realms with the much-loved Cassapal flag on center mast, and the largest...perhaps a statement that The Sperry cruised for all, a focus of Cassapalian positive political and societal wares to the globe as a whole.

Our seven people (a coincidence to the amount of flags) who'd gone all over the globe were today stirred well and excited...when one of them, thin half-elf Fingold Albaitis (very dark hair, by the way) found his youthful adult blue-green eyes locked on a large cavern entrance extremely high up the side of a cliff-lined shore the ship was near while making a brave jaunt to an unknown fjord ahead. Fingold perceived the hole before any, but was known for that kind of thing.

We seven discussed the wide and tall cavern above, shaped almost like it held a portcullis. But it was surely just a natural break, correct?

The ship became stopped and anchored, a sea generously too warm to make much ice. It was nice aboard the vessel's carved wood, both shiny with cold condensation yet warm from the sun.

Away to preparation we seven went, the separate crew helping our quick prep and the Commander watching all as she sipped very hot butter tea that steamed like smoke in a way.

To the sea at the base of the cavern vertical cliff wall we went, finally taking the lowered and secured beach dinghy from Sperry. Yes, we agreed to do this questionable exploring gig because three of us smelled treasure...no names mentioned and more than likely a “treasure” of stones and ice, but you never know. Not to mention good vibes on what may *hide* in a huge marine cave, this banefully pristine so far from anything known.

Bobbing at the unlandable shore at least one of us, Fingold in fact, worried there might be some dangerous creature in the waters here, so dark they were and so wacky fjord deep. Everyone found that a bit funny, in a cute way of course.

The group just floated in the dinghy out here until one of our people stood, a curious male from endless deserts near tropic and wild areas of the world. His skin was rich mahogany and his height very tall. His name was Muudo, an educated man in meticulously assembled mild-plate armor who left his home for the sea, to live free among peoples of endless type or gender. Generally mysterious while he regularly sat having vegan meals alone, or did his ropes with knots of such Naval expertise it seemed a little crazy.

Muudo unpacked his unique steel grappling hook, which I'd seen him use before. Not at all like normal metal, this hook had power of its own and could soar to great heights and next cling to mere air, holding tremendous weight on its rope if needed from an almost invisible spidroin thread, grey in color...and wherever the hook was told to stay-hold it would do so 100% until commanded to release and leave. For sure a super simple device, super effective.

Away Muudo tossed the hook, precision ejected up in the air and obviously moving on its own to the top of the cliff cavern entrance...where it firmly hooked and made its rope available.

To the rope we all went. And skyward. It was kind of fantastic in a way, becoming a view impeccable with cool breezes very nice and a little tough going, though we all climbed a bit easier than normal. Hm. Reckon that *spidroin* had something to do...?

In no time all seven of us were in place before the cavernous cliff door. Clearly this was a large fully organic cave, quite bigger than many...and oddly decorated. Oh, dear. That didn't happen by itself.

Indeed the cave was extremely large inside, almost like a standard city coliseum in height and width...but the place was covered in sugary lights, very radiant everywhere and smattered with gorgeous rainbow coloring from cast beams and patterns. Add glass-esque thin strip banners hanging in modest number from walls and ceilings and covered in runes. Glowing. Kind of enchanted.

Another of our group was a very small woman with minimal red and silver metallic hair, somewhere in her mid-20s and physically covered very well in professional evening armor tones made from canvas and hemp, including the small hat thing she wore as a kind of minor skull cap.

Her expertise was language. Oddly she could read about anything over time, and no one really knew why or how. So no one asked. Away she went toward something in a wall near yet another big cavern entrance hallway, a place well-lit with an area beyond it not clearly distinct.

This red/silver hair woman was Dahlia, light skinned and a bit of customized cosmetics. She approached a spread of rocky rune writing on the far wall, large and detailed like a weird open novel. She frowned a bit. The manufactured display was maybe a big wide plaque of some kind, runes nicely chiseled in outrageous size variation, framed and lit with borders of baroque lines or something and all of it dappled in ice and snow which Dahlia smoothed away from the surface and carefully examined.

Our black leather bodice warrior Solène (sometimes as *Leena*) came up to Dahlia from behind, examining the rune wall and kneeling to check something on the ground, which looked a bit like a cover. But it wasn't. Just rocks.

Dahlia opened a laced pocket on a pant leg, pulled a piece of folded papyrus she quickly expanded. It was wide as Muudo was tall, and she placed the papyrus against a concentration of runes, where it acted like adhesive. Dahlia placed her hands akimbo, watching and waiting for the items to do something.

Another of the group was a very stout and muscular chap named D'Leo, easily tall as Muudo but robust and well clothed with a warm "marine-skin" cold weather light armor uniform of some kind, powder blue in tones and impeccably designed for battle and pleasure. Apparently.

D'Leo was looking around with hand on his dilapidated leg-strapped broadsword handle, a rather primitive looking piece of gear surprisingly deadly. He stood with the last member of the group, Ballist, a young man with virtually no hair since he shaved every day, face and head alike. Ballist was pale, somewhat tall in clothing manufactured at a high grade from one of the fancier places about, not really expensive but a nice doublet atop some kind of really thin luxuriant grey fur, to keep him from shivering. The fur was also a fun place he could hide his thin-bottle rum, or maybe dark wines.

Right now Ballist investigated the source of the fabulous rainbow and white lights in the entirety of the cavern. His expertise was new, in ways not clear to many. His design of special lanterns kept on The Sperry masts every night were a small cool item in his already long history.

Ballist knelt down to a single light. He brushed snow off the item, immediately revealed what appeared to be a sports store “kale ball”.

Also called “bowling ball”. Yes, that’s correct.

“This is a bowling ball,” he said.

Others approached as he brushed the seriously luminous sphere, revealing the three finger holes to all. This particular ball’s gold light was so intense it appeared like a small sun in a way. Fingold was convinced that...

“Light spell. Every enchantment here, from red to blue to green and so on. Seems permanent. Lot of work. And money.”

Dahlia surprisingly arrived, placed a single hand on the ball, felt nothing. “It’s lovely,” she said, then turned around and went directly back to the wall she was doing. Funny.

D’Leo seemed a bit concerned. “Not sure we belong here. Seems private.”

“Better pull your sword,” says Solène, of course with her hard humor.

A strange sound suddenly vibrated across the floor, coming from the other runed-surrounded Dahlia cavern entrance leading farther into the cliff body. The sound was like a sudden shift of mass, not insanely huge but like a weighty creature, maybe...

A small head peeked from the cavern entrance. The creature was about the size of a dairy cow and no doubt fascinating.

Staring at the group of seven with a cute little smile on its face was a tiny wyrmling, a baby dragon of unusual genetics. The infant had skin beautifully icy blue and 100% transparent. Almost a sculpture in essence, with incredible interior biological detail revealed.

The wyrmling's eyes were pure round black, a contrast to the clarity of skin. Its teeth were artistically flawless, white and sparkly like opal iridescence and sharp as lightning.

Most interesting of all was a miniature royal crown worn by the baby dragon, almost like a costume item. It was precious, not overstated, a five-prong cartoonish accent and no question made from solid platinum or similar metal.

And with little obsidian orbs on each prong.

Craziest thing was, it was observable that the crown was *growing* from the top center of the small dragon's head, somehow fused to the tot's skull and part of actual anatomy.

The crowned wyrmling was definitely inexperienced. Just a tyke. It kept smiling and then lifted a wonderfully onyx-clawed translucent paw to wave.

Ballist gave a nice wave back. And everyone kind of stared at Ballist, with D'Leo looking mortified. Ballist gave D'Leo a glare and said, "Do we leave now?"

As the entire group knew well, D'Leo was a long-proven exceptional fighter tactician, also supernatural in skill with that heavy old sword he carried...and even better with two of the same type used at the same time. Which he enjoyed, but hated carrying a second.

Dahlia whispered, "What sort of dragon is this?" Her group answer was silence and a couple nice shrugs. "Okay then," she said.

Another sound of weight-shift gently rumbled to the cavern. And yes, another wyrmling appeared, this one very curious as it rose slowly into view...with the same kind of grown crown as its relative had, except this crown was solid gold. Absolutely solid and shiny, topped on each prong by pearls, even.

So now my group of seven had two tiny young dragons watching them, creatures with eyes like deep space and skin awesomely blue-toned but entertainingly transparent: bones, veins, tendons, nerves...everything was seen.

Dahlia was closer to the two wyrmlings, from her position at macabre runes. She was factually charmed by the reptile pair and slowly started to approach.

“Dahlia!” yell-whispered Fingold. “A smidgeon unwise.”

“Yes,” said Muudo. “We should leave.”

Solène sort of smiled. “Too late for that.”

Exactly there, a powerful slow thud began to grow, incremental and approaching. Within a handful of seconds another head crown appeared, rising in the cavern entrance behind the wyrmlings, this crown at *least* as tall as Leo...or myself...and fully diamond, its five prongs tipped with glittery Cerargyrite orbs.

This third dragon, undoubtably colossal in ancient years, rose from behind the wyrmlings and filled the entire titan second entrance with its long neck like a thick ice pole showing a duct of some kind connecting its defensive breath expulsion organs...with its insanely large body superbly powerful and slender, an entity almost false in smooth reality, so spectacular with color and tone and see-through reflections.

With space black circular eyes. And two innocent dragon children at its feet, wings, protective stare.

Fingold reached into his wintery-style vest garb and pulled a kooky green wooden thing the size of natural papaya. On top it had a fuse. For sure a low-caliber bomb of some kind.

“Leave now. I’ll throw if it comes.”

Muudo looked suspicious. “Fruit bomb? Really?” Fingold raised an eyebrow. “Yes, and special. Should collapse the roof if we need it. Gives us all time to get out.”

Solène wasn’t convinced. “This is silly.”

Fingold closely watched the main dragon. Then he said, “Okay, next time a better plan, right? But this time...”

Dahlia was somewhat worried and decided to pull her papyrus from the runes, which already imprinted all the writing she'd covered in a style of burning that was highly engaged.

And let's be honest: for certain this entire group had abilities against all sorts of obstacles...but a stellar dragon of this nature was easily outside their experience, especially given the dragon's forbidding size and unknown qualities.

So who's at fault, here? Likely the group, for sure. Nobody asked the seven of us to invade, and they all knew it. And who really had any good idea what kind of exotic dragons these are, in this hidden part of the world.

Once Dahlia had her stuff back to place the group minus Fingold moved quietly and smoothly back toward the outside cliff entrance. The adult dragon was not amused, and watched them with its face having what anyone could see as great contempt.

Fingold put one of his hands out and lit some sort of flint thing that produced a white-flash violet flame. The adult dragon turned Fingold's way and tilted its head, its non-pretentious five bit crown fully base secured in stone-strength bone of transparent skull.

The old dragon gently pushed its two dear wyrmlings out of view from the opening natural arch and took a couple casual steps forward, inside. It looked over to the group escaping and didn't seem to care much. Then it looked at Fingold, curious but angry. It made a heavy step forward, a wicked grin-snarl on its lips further exposing perfect gourmet cleaver teeth. And a hiss.

From all this the dragon's zero-light round eyes revealed obvious intelligence and cunning. Many tons of weight from its movement caused walls and ceilings to vibrate and shed snow through multicolors, strangely magnificent at a strange time, indeed.

Fingold took a slow step in reverse, then another. He looked over and saw his group was long gone, but they couldn't have gotten to the Sperry yet.

The almost crystal-clear dragon made another step forward, its weight knocking more snow from the walls and ceiling, amazing with the bowling ball permanent light about.



But Fingold made an error. He stepped unseen opposite again but failed to notice a tiny break where ice put a fracture in the floor...and his boot slid right into it. Fingold fell flat and sideways and his lit flint thing bounced across his chest into the papaya fruit bomb fuse.

And, the fuse was unexpectedly made to light. Uh oh.

Fingold immediately grabbed toward it, but his boot was bound in the ice. The huge dragon no doubt saw all this going on, a bit confused for a second but then knew it must take action.

Fingold tried and tried to get his boot free while the bomb item was burn-shortening its fuse. Fingold knew the game was over.

Then the dragon reared slowly back, obviously prepping a breath shot. And likely not fire. Fingold was done.

Except that *right* near the climax he pulled the boot free, rolled to his side and ran for the exterior entrance they'd all come through to get here.

It was then the dragon expelled a breath cone of brilliant white liquid. It wasn't flame at all but some sort of shockingly cold chemical...and the second the beautiful fluid left the dragon's mouth the "papaya" bomb went off.

The huge explosion blew a violent vacuum ring in a clear circle, sending a shockwave to Fingold and the whole place. As the blast from the bomb shoved Fingold right through the entrance it also ignited the dragon's breath cone in a magnesium-style whiteout detonation several times more powerful than Fingold's looney fruit...so the roof of the cliff cavern collapsed and everything inside flattened, of course with all kinds of ice and rock shooting out the cavern entrance toward the sea and The Sperry below...with Fingold becoming part of it.

Down down through the chilly air did Fingold go, landing in the water with a huge splash right in front of the group dinghy making way back to Sperry, and with chunks of ice falling all around like meteors and missing the boats by a miracle.

Fingold of course hit the water very hard and went deep into the sea. Down the force of fall sent him; slowly he came to a drowning pause in the near dark ocean.

And right in front of him a black fishy creature the size of a rural barn stared his way, its skin oddly armored like a definite predator of some sort, eyes slightly glowing with a greenish blur. Add some comical uneven teeth, like a broken fence made from pointy turnips.

Fingold got away fast as possible, swimming himself up again. The giant black fish simply watched with its green-glow eyes in a manner that sort of suggested “intrigue”.

Fingold burst to the surface and was grabbed aboard the dinghy. He didn’t even realize the cold, on hypothermia’s edge.

“Look!” yelled Dahlia, pointing at the sky near the now exploded cliff cavern.

Flying distant through the air like a genius pilot was the large diamond crown dragon with burn blasts all over its transparent skin...and carrying its little wyrmlings comfortably gripped, one in either of its picturesque leg claws.

The fashionable crown dragon trio moved through high atmosphere far opposite The Sperry. Yes, away the three went to destination unknown.

Once back to The Sperry my group found the whole situation a bit amusing. It was agreed with the Commander to continue Sperry toward the pole and perhaps someday return to the ice dragon’s domain, to see the exact story at hand.

Most wanted by all was an answer about the crowns. Meanwhile, a bit of bier. With the Commander herself. Who made it. Oh, and a wee honey daub, for those interested.

As for me? I’m Charlie. A good bloke from glorious Cassapal. You know, the society nation most powerfully afoot...center banner on The Sperry?

For today, anyway.

If you haven’t guessed by now, I, Charlie, wasn’t there among cosmically excellent dragons. Or the boats. No physical “Number Seven” in our group. Just six.

Oh, I was *part* of the group, for sure. Sometime in the future it’ll all be clear.

Let’s just say I was invisible the whole time in this story. Since I was.

Cheers.

End.